Florida

Physical Features

Florida is a peninsula—that means it's almost completely surrounded by water. Its northernmost edge is connected to Alabama in the northwest and Georgia in the northeast. Take a swim off Florida's west coast, and you'll be in the Gulf of Mexico. Dive in off the east coast, and you'll be splashing in the Atlantic Ocean. Off the south coast, you'll be swimming in the Straits of Florida. No matter where you are in Florida, you're no more than 60 miles from the ocean. Florida boasts 1,300 miles of coastline and 663 miles of beaches.

The Florida peninsula is made of up four main land regions: the coastal plains, the uplands, the Everglades and the Florida Keys. Found across these regions are a variety of water features, including marshes, springs, swamps, lakes, rivers and ponds. Lake Okeechobee, also known as Florida's Inland Sea, is the largest freshwater lake in the state of Florida. The largest rivers in Florida are the St. Johns River, the Choctawhatchee River, the Escambia River, and the Apalachicola River.

The northern "upland" part of the state is hilly, but you'll find caves and sinkholes in the northwestern Marianna lowlands. The coastal plains contain sandy beaches, islands, and coral reefs. In the south, you can canoe through the famous Everglades National Park—swampy, wildlife-filled marshland that covers 1.5 million acres. Off the southernmost tip of the state are the Florida Keys, a group of about 1,700 tiny islands called an archipelago. Want to island-hop? No problem. A causeway and 42 bridges connect the various keys.

Florida's wildlife includes mammals like armadillos, black bears, and the Florida panther; reptiles such as alligators, crocodiles, and snakes; sea life like manatees, sea turtles, dolphins, and whales; and birds such as raptors, owls, cranes, and Florida's state bird, the mockingbird. More than 300 types of native trees grow in the state, from apple and cherry trees in the north to mangrove forests in the swamps. Tall sawgrass is a common sight in marshes, though Florida's most famous plant may be the orange tree—the orange blossom is the state flower. Did you know that the Florida Everglades are the only place in the world where crocodiles and alligators live together?

The climate of Florida is so because most parts of the state are not very far from the ocean. North of Lake Okeechobee, the prevalent climate is humid subtropical, while coastal areas south of the lake (including the Florida Keys) have a true tropical climate. Mean high temperatures for late July are between 32–34 °C. Mean low temperatures for early to mid-January range from 4–7 °C in northern Florida to 13 °C in southern Florida.

Florida's nickname is the "Sunshine State". A narrow eastern part of the state including Orlando and Jacksonville receives between 2,400 and 2,800 hours of sunshine annually. The rest of the state, including Miami, receives between 2,800 and 3,200 hours annually. Severe weather is a common occurrence in the state. Central Florida is known as the lightning capital of the United States, as it experiences more lightning strikes than anywhere else in the country. Hurricanes pose a severe threat during hurricane season, which lasts from June 1 to November 30, although some storms have been known to form out of season. Florida is the most hurricane-prone US state, with subtropical or tropical water on a lengthy coastline. From 1851 to 2006, Florida has been struck by 114 hurricanes, 37 of them major—category 3 and above. In 2004, Florida was hit by a record four hurricanes. Hurricanes Charley (August 13), Frances (September 4–5), Ivan (September 16), and Jeanne (September 25–26)

Human Features

Florida is home to 21.48 million people (as of 2019) making it the third most populous state in America. Although the capital is Tallahassee, the city with the largest population is Jacksonville. Many people choose to retire to Florida and nearly 20% of it's population are 65 or over.

Florida has 131 public airports, and more than 700 private airports, airstrips, heliports, and seaplane bases. It has more toll roads, bridges, and golf courses than any other state in the nation.

Florida can make an excellent vacation spot thanks to its 663 miles of beaches and—of course—Disney World! It is one of the top travel destinations in the world, with 131.4 million visitors in 2019! Tourists are drawn to Florida for many reasons. Disney World is 40-square-mile park in the city of Orlando. It has more than 70,000 employees. According to estimates, the Magic Kingdom welcomed 20,963,000 guests in 2019, an average of 57,433 guests per day. Whilst in Orlando, you can also visit Universal Studios: a theme park with attractions such as 'Harry Potter and the Escape from the Gringotts' and 'Despicable Me Minion Mayhem'. The state can even take you out of this world … literally! You can see an actual rocket launch from Cape Canaveral, where rockets have been taking off since 1950. Tourists also enjoy visiting Miami, famed for it's beaches, weather and nightlife, and the unique ecosystem of the Everglades where you can get up close and personal with wildlife and nature.

Many believe that Ponce de León (a Spanish explorer who lead the first European expedition to Florida in 1513) was the first to plant orange seeds in Florida. Three centuries later, newly-built railroads allowed growers to ship oranges across the United States. Today the state produces 70% of the oranges in the United States and supplies 40% of the world's orange juice. Yum! Did you know that Florida also produces more tomatoes, strawberries, sugar and watermelons than any other state? Florida's economy relies on it's natural resources such as sugarcane, fish, petroleum and phosphate (used for fertilizer) which it distributes worldwide.

